

*Some modest Reflections upon the Commitment of
the Earl of Shaftsbury, arising from the late
Indictment against Mr. Stephen Colledge.*

TIS long since we were assured by those to whom we owe intire Credit, that had the Papists succeeded in their Design of Murthering the King, 1678. the Dissenters, and such others as they proposed to register and inroll in that number, were to have been charged with the Guilt of that Divellish and Traiterous Assassination: But it pleased God, through a timely discovery of their Hellish Conspiracy, not only happily to preserve his Majesties Life, but to deliver many thousand innocent Persons from the Capital dangers, into which the *Romish* Party had contriv'd to have brought them, by a false and scandalous Accusation. And therefore finding the Nation not only awakened to preserve it self by all due and Loyal ways, but justly provok'd to bring upon them the punishments which they had deserved by that Hellish Plot against the Person of the King, the established Government, our Religion, and the Lives of all true Protestants; they have been endeavouring since, by all the Arts and Industry they could, partly to Corrupt the Witnesses that had discovered their Villanies, and deposed against them, and partly to oblige them, and such other profligate Persons as they could hire and suborn, to swear a Sham-Plot, wherein his Majesties best and most Loyal Protestant Subjects should be reported to be engaged. And though they have been detected in above twenty several Instances of this kind, and thereupon disappointed as to the ends which they proposed unto themselves; yet having another Game which they can play with any probability of success, they pursue this Design with the more indefatigableness, and having employ'd their Policy to mould it into some credible form, they have been at great expence to bribe needy and debauch'd Fellows to support and confirm it by horrid and unprecedented Perjuries. For they suppose, that could they but get one Protestant to be found Guilty upon such an Indictment as they have been providing and framing matter for, they should then be able to involve a great many under the Suspicion of the same Guilt. And consequently, should the King come to be Assassinated by some Popish Hand, they would labour to render Protestants obnoxious to the scandal of having perpetrated so abominable a Crime. However, by suggesting to his Majesty, that His Protestant Subjects are embark'd in a Conspiracy against His Person; they do promise themselves to bring the King either to trust and rely upon them for His safety, or to grant an Act of Universal Oblivion for the quieting the minds of His People, and the peace of His Government. Or the least that they do hope from this pretended Plot, is, That the same Persons being produced as Witnesses in this Case, that had appeared to give Evidence concerning the *Popish Plot* in *England* and *Ireland*, they shall come to be disbelieved in reference to the one, through their not obtaining Credit in relation to the other. But as I shall at present decline the Consideration of those Reasons, why these very Witnesses ought to be believed in whatsoever they have Sworn against the Papists; though no Faith or Credit are to be given unto what they depose against Protestants, so I conceive the Papal Party may happen to exclude themselves from having any share in an Act of Indemnity, by being the Authors and Promoters of this *Sham* Conspiracy, whereby they would ruin so many of the chief upholders of the Established Government, and the Reformed Religion. Nor can there be a greater Evidence that the *Popish Plot* is as effectually carried on as ever, than this late attempt to render His Majesty jealous of His most Loyal Subjects, and to cause them to be distrustful of Him; and thereby render Him and them naked of all Defence against the manifold preparations they have made both at home and abroad, for the destroying of His Person, and the Subversion of the Government.

It is beyond all contradiction out of whose *Forge* this *Engine* to endanger our Peace, and destroy many Innocent Protestants came; seeing it appears by the Testimony of good and substantial Witnesses, that the *Priests* in *Flanders* had not only notice of, but divulged it to such as they conversed with abroad, before there was any suspect or apprehension of it here. For there are several now in Town who were not only told beyond Sea, about the 27th and 28th of June, that my Lord of *Shaftsbury* and divers others would be secured before the said Persons could arrive in *England*; but the *Priests* who were the Authors of this unto them, openly declared that they expected such success in their projections and undertakings from it, as to be able to say Mass in our Churches at London before *Christmas* next. Nor was it only in *Flanders*, where the *Fathers* and those they had intrusted this secret unto were acquainted with it; but we understand the same by some lately come through *France*, who also heard from the like hands, that the Earl of *Shaftsbury* and many other Protestant Lords were to be committed, before the most Inquisitive and Sagacious here, could entertain a thought that there was any such thing intended.

But it is easier for men acted by rage and malice, to frame and contrive a Design whereby to ruine others, than to make it coherent in the parts of it, or give it that Face and Colour which may render it probable. And as no man that knowes the Earl of *Shaftsbury*, will think that ever he could enter into such a Conspiracy as he is charged with, much less can they believe that Persons of so mean Fortunes and shallow understandings as hitherto are accused for it should not only be acquainted with, but have the Principal promoting of it committed unto them. For tho' Mr. *Whitaker* and Mr. *Colledge* may be men very well qualified for their respective Employments, of great zeal for the Protestant Interest, and the legal Rights of the People, and of good reputation for their Integrity, yet they are not Persons of those Abilities, Estates or Power in their Country, as to be preferred before others above them in understanding, as well as in all other respects, to be consulted and advised with about the regulation or change of the Government.

But we apply our selves to consider the nature and quality of this Plot, as it is set into it, and have it a little unveiled by the *Indictment* preferred against Mr. *Stephen Colledge* on Friday last, we shall go near to find this Protestant Conspiracy, that some have made such a noise about, to be the most ridiculous and *Romantic* Invention that ever men pretending to wit or sense suffered to be imposed upon their belief. For by *Colledges* being introduced by one of the Witnesses reviling the Duke of *Monmouth*, in terms as gross and opprobrious as false, all that know the Man are sufficiently instructed what little truth there is in all the rest whereof he is accused. For there is none in the world that he hath that known esteem for, and in whose service in consistency with his Loyalty to his Prince, he would so soon sacrifice himself and all that he hath, as the Duke of *Monmouth*. And so far do all men judge him from using such ignominious expressions as he is accused of concerning that great Personage, that they verily think had any of the Witnesses used that Language of his Grace in *Colledges* hearing, he would have taught him better manners, though with the hazard of his life. But the *Papists* are so accustomed to asperse and slander this Duke in the most ignominious Terms, that they cannot forbear the fathering base and reproachful Calumnies of him upon such who would not forgive themselves the Crime of having a low or diminishing thought concerning him. But the Design of making this accused person speak thus vilifyingly of his Grace, is too obvious not to be discerned, and so silly that every Apprentice Youth laughs at it. The Popish Party finding that the Duke is sincerely and unchangably fixed for the Protestant Religion; and that thereupon he hath a great and deserved room in the hearts of all true *Englishmen*; they would fain endeavour to perswade him that the People do despise and scorn him, thinking that if any thing could, this would make him less Zealous for the Protestant Doctrine and Worship. But they will find themselves deceived; for as nothing can abate his love to the Established Religion, so the extraordinary respect which the People do Universally bear him upon this account is neither to be lessened towards nor alienated from him. But when we advance a step further, and

and find this pretended Plot to be no less than a National Conspiracy to destroy a Prince whom they to unanimously restored to the Throne of his Ancestors a few years ago, we shall find cause to disbelieve every word concerning it; and to pity the folly and simplicity of those that have endeavoured to abuse his Majesty, and his Ministers with so ill contrived a Sham. For according to the Evidence which *Smith* and others, gave in Court, it is no less than a Plot, wherein not only *City* and *Country*, but the very *Parliament* are all embark't and engaged. But as the naming and interesting the *Parliament* in a Conspiracy, is enough to satisfy any reasonable man that there is none at all; so it enlightens us upon what Motive and Inducement all this is invented and contrived. For the *Papists*, knowing the Villanies which they are Guilty of, and being sensible of the Dangers they are lyable unto from the Justice of a *Parliament* whensoever one meets and continues to sit; they have therefore no other course to steer, but to render *Parliaments* suspected to his Majesty, that he may call no more. Accordingly after they had hired a company of rascally scriblers to defame *Parliaments*, especially the *House of Commons*; they now assume the impudence openly to arraign them of a Treasonable Design of Deposing the King and altering the Government. But the fellows, whom they had suborned to this purpose, tho' they had the Villany to become instruments in so black an undertaking, yet they had not the wit to conceal it till it was ripe to be vented and improved. For besides that one had the boldness in a late Pamphlet to advise the King to reign Arbitrarily, *Smith* that famous Witness is known to have given out some time ago that he would spoil our *Parliaments*. But the suffering Mercenary Persons to speak and write of *Parliaments* with that Impunity they have done of late, is enough to detect and betray the whole project and design to every rational man. And can any one think that if there were such a Conspiracy wherein so many Persons of Quality, Power and Estates were engaged; that his Majesties Guards would be able to prevent their executing whatsoever they intended? Or can any man imagin that it is for the Kings safety and Interest, to have the generality of his People brought to believe that he entertains such an opinion of them, as that they are United in a Conspiracy against his Person and Government? Were not the King safe through the room that he enjoys in the hearts of his People, and did not they apprehend themselves protected by their own Innocency; what *Smith* said in the Face of so great an Assembly as was at the *Old-Baily* on *Friday* last, and with so much impudence, that it plainly appeared to be spoken upon Design, were enough to blow up the Peace of the Nation, and to throw us into blood in four and twenty hours.

But the place where this Plot of seizing the King was to have been Executed, does further assure us, that all this is meer Fiction and Romance, and that there was no such thing ever thought of. For as it was impossible that any number of Men proportionable to such an undertaking, could go to *Oxford* without being seen and observed, so it is very well known, that the Town was much emptier than could have been expected, considering that together with the whole Court, the great Council of the Kingdom was there Assembled. And instead of the Members being accompanied with a Train suitable to such a Design, they denied themselves the having those menial Servants, with which they are usually attended else where. 'Tis true that some Gentlemen were honoured with the company of their Friends, some part of the way thither; but it is as true that the Persons who paid them that respect, returned quietly to their Habitations, after they had discharged that piece of Civility, which they owed their Representatives. And whereas it was Sworn, that they rode Arm'd and with led Horses, and that this was in order to apprehend the King; I shall take the liberty to say, that the Person who made such an Inference deserved a Reprimand in the open Court. Shall the Witness *Smith* ride out of Town accompanied with two Servants martially accoutred with *Fusées* and *Pistols*, as he did on *Sunday* last? And shall not Lords, Knights and the best Gentlemen in the Kingdom be allowed to travel with a Sumpter Horse, and a man or two with Carbines, but there must be a Conspiracy to destroy the Government? But though some men have both lost their Discretion, and made Shipwrack of their honesty, in obtruding so false and nonsensical a Story upon the Nation; yet are those whose Wit and Understanding have not so far forsaken them, but that they can see through all this, and whose Integrity will guide and oblige them to judge impartially. For is it to be apprehended that they could entertain a purpose of seizing the King at *Oxford*, who were so afraid of venturing themselves thither, and so importunate with His Majesty, that the *Parliament* might have sat at *Westminster*.

Alas! instead of harbouring any thoughts of attempting upon the King, or others, they were apprehensive that the *Papists* had some design to be Executed there against them.

Was it ever known, that when a Conspiracy was so universally laid, as this is said to have been, and wherein so many were concerned, as are reported to have been engaged in this, that Men would lose the only opportunity of Executing what they had intended, knowing withall the punishments to which they were lyable should they be discovered, and how impossible it would be

to conceal a business of so high and dangerous Nature, with which so many were made acquainted. And can there be any thing more incredible, than that there should have been such a Plot against His Majesty at *Oxford*, and yet that there should never appear the least *Symptom* or Umbrage of it, neither during the sitting of Parliament, nor at, or after their Dissolution: Yea was not His Majesty so surrounded with armed Forces, besides His having the whole *Militia* and *Posse* of the Shire in Hands that he could trust, that the Noble-men, and Gentlemen who are fabled to have been in this Conspiracy, bearing no proportion unto them, the very thought of such a thing as is imposed upon them, would have argued them *Lunatick* and Distracted. But what Villains were these Witnesses, if they knew of such a Design, that they did not acquaint His Majesty with it, before He expos'd His Person to so eminent a hazard. Or how comes it if the King and his Ministers knew it, that it hath lain dormant so long since. For besides the great danger to which they must be believed to have suffered His Person and the Government to have been all this while exposed, if they were informed of such a Plot so long ago; this one thing had been a more justifiable reason of the speedy dissolving that Parliament, than all that are in the Declaration which was published upon that occasion. 'Tis true, Mr. *David Fitz-Gerald* spake of such a design the Night after the Parliament was Dissolved with this further Addition, That the City of *London* was in Arms, and that his Majesty would have been Apprehended, had he not escaped in that haste which he did. But as the falsity of one part of this scandalous Suggestion shews of what Metal and Stamp all the rest is, so no Man had more reason to rejoice in the Parliaments being Dissolved, than this Footman *Marston* of late into a Gentleman of Quality and Estate. For had the House sat on that *Monday* to hear the Cause which was depending before them against him, he had been made appear to be the most infamous Person alive, and more worthy of being sent to some place, provided for receiving the worst of Men, than to be allowed to frequent the Palaces of publick Ministers, and the Houses of Administrators of Justice.

But if we enquire into the quality of the Witnesses, and consider not only the probabilities, but the Demonstrative Evidences of their having been tampered with, we shall be yet more clearly convinced, that there neither is, nor ever was any such Plot as the *Earl of Shaftsbury* stands Committed for. And to Wave the Consideration of the several Crimes with which all of them are Chargeable, and for which some of them have been Indicted and Arraigned, I shall insist upon some other Topics, which it may be more convenient at present to Discourse of. It is, therefore in the first place no small Inducement to think that they have been suborned, that it can be proved upon all of them, and that by many Persons and those of as good Reputation as any in and about the City; that they have often declared, even since the *Oxford* Parliament, that they never knew of any Presbyterian Plot, nor of any Conspiracy, wherein so much as one Protestant was engaged. And Secondly, it contributes something to raise in us the same Persuasion, that they delivered their Testimony, as if it had been consigned to them to get by Heart, and not as a Deposition relating to words, which they had heard in occasional Discourse some time since, and which they were to call over with that fear and modesty, which became Persons that were liable to mistake and forget. Thirdly, The Garb which they so lately gotten into, and the plenty of Money that their Pockets are filled with, increases the belief that they have been managed by some one or other to say what they do, and that they are well paid and rewarded for it.

For some of them that were lately in Debt beyond any probability of being ever able to pay what they owed, have within these few days found Money both to discharge their Creditors, and new ramp themselves. Fourthly, It creates a shrewd suspicion how these Persons came to appear as Evidence for the proof of a Protestant Plot; thus dissenting others, as will appear in due time by their own Depositions, have been tempted to be favorable in the same Design. Fifthly, that all this is *sworn*, and proceeds from Subornation: Is evident beyond all control; in that some of the six Witnesses who were mustered up at the *Old-Baily* on Friday last, after they had sworn such and such things in the Face of the Court, acknowledged to the Grand-Jury when they were Examined one by one, that they were hired unto it, and that they had a sum of Money for doing of it. Which as it vindicates the Integrity of the Jury in returning *Verdicts* upon the *Bill*; so it intimates unto us upon what Reasons some whom I forbear to name, opposed their being Examined apart. For as all the persons who served in that Jury are men of that known honesty and uprightness, that they would not willfully Perjure themselves to save a Kingdom; most of them are not only avowed Members of the Church of *England*, but two at this very time *Church-Wardens*, and a third of them an Officer in the Reformed Militia of the City. But it being hop'd that they will give the World an account of the Justice of their own Verdict, I shall leave what may be further said in the Vindication of it to themselves.

But what will it amount unto towards the proof of a Protestant Plot, wherein my Lord of *Shaftsbury* and many other Great and worthy Persons are said to be concerned; if some rash and unadvised words should be perred against *Colledge* and *Whitaker*. Shall other men, and those the best and wisest in the Nation under his Majesty, be immediately judged Traitors, because one of two warm and inconsiderate persons have talk'd foolishly and extravagantly. We are fallen into a strange World, if a Body of men must be made accountable for the giddiness of some, and those such as they had little converse with. Nor are the *Episcopicks* to be reproached for the unwary and Dangerous suggestions of these Persons, being they are not only Members of the Church of *England*, but chargeable with long failures, that the Dissenting Churches would not allow any to continue in their Communion that should be found Guilty of them.

But I shall leave the further pursuit of this at the present, and only add that the same day that the *Earl of Shaftsbury* was committed to the *Tower*, there was a Warrant obtain'd of His Majesty to the Privy Seal, for the pardoning three *Quakers* that are known Traitors. Which as it intimates how much His Majesty is sollicitous by some ill men, so this ought to be recorded for his Honour, that he commanded the signing of their Pardon as soon as he understood what they were.

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